

THE HAND OF

FATE

FEB.
10c

ACE

I WARNED YOU...THERE ARE
NO SHORT CUTS IN LIFE...NOW YOU
MUST PAY FOR YOUR FOLLY!





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SPECTERS STALK The BLOODY TOWER



FROM THE BANKS OF THE THAMES, THE TOWER OF LONDON BROODS OMINOUSLY OVER THE SURROUNDING CITY / EVERY STONE IN THE CRIME-TAINTED TOWER IS STEEPED IN DARK EVENTS — AND BY THE BLOOD OF NOBLES AND PRINCEINGS IMPRISONED AND EXECUTED THERE. THE ENGLISH BELIEVE THAT NIGHTLY THE GHOST OF ANNE BOLEYN, BEHEADED WIFE OF HENRY VIII, PACES THE GLOOMY CORRIDORS IN THE COMPANY OF SPECTRAL NOBILITY, BUT CHARLES KEMP DIDN'T BELIEVE IN LEGENDS!

A TRAITOROUS MISSION FOUND ENGLISHMAN CHARLES KEMP MEETING HANS, A FELLOW FIFTH COLUMNIST, IN THE SHADOW OF THE TOWER OF LONDON ON THAT FATEFUL NIGHT IN 1940.



HERE'S THE MICROFILM, HANS! I RAN AN AWFUL RISK GETTING THEM! IS THE PLAN FOR TONIGHT GOING THROUGH?

WHEEEEEE



YES, HERR KEMP! DER FUHRER'S PLANES SHOULD BE HERE ANY MOMENT! YOUR UNDERCOVER WORK WILL MAKE TONIGHT'S RAID A SUCCESS! AH, THERE GOES THE AIR RAID SIREN.

IN A FEW MOMENTS THE DARKENING SKY WAS FILLED WITH GERMAN PLANES DROPPING DEATH AND DESTRUCTION ON THE CITY.

THAT WAS A CLOSE ONE! A DIRECT HIT ON THE NORTH WALL OF THE TOWER!

I'M HEADING FOR AN AIR RAID SHELTER! I WILL BE OF NO USE TO THE FUHRER IF I'M DEAD!



BLASTED A BIG HOLE,
AND NOT FAR FROM
THE BLOODY TOWER!
HERE, HANS, I HAVE
A FLASHLIGHT,
LET'S TAKE A
LOOK-SEE!

NOT ME,
KEMPI I WILL
SEE YOU AT
THE APPOINTED
PLACE ON
TUESDAY!
GOOD-BYE!

HANS FLED AS CHARLES
STEPPED THROUGH THE BREACH
IN THE WALL...

WONDER IF
HITLER'S BOMBS ARE DISTURBING
THE PRECIOUS GHOSTS OF THE
TOWER THAT MY GULLIBLE
ENGLISH COMRADES BELIEVE
EXIST! HANS RUNS AS IF THE

GHOST OF ANNE
BOLEYN WERE
ON HIS TAIL!

NOT MUCH LATER, CHARLES
REALIZED HE WAS LOST! THE
CORRIDORS STRETCHED OUT, DARK
AND ENDLESS. THE VERY DARK-
NESS MOCKED HIM WITH THE
SOUNDS OF SILKS SWISHING BY, OF
STEEL CLANGING ON STEEL, OF
STEALTHY FOOTSTEPS...

IT WAS EASY TO GET IN, BUT HOW
DO I GET OUT? SEEMS LIKE I'VE
BEEN HERE FOR HOURS!
WHAT'S THAT?
WHO'S THERE?

I'M GETTING JUMPY! I'D SWEAR
I HEARD SOMEONE! NOW... A CLOCK
TOLLING... TEN, ELEVEN, TWELVE!
IT CAN'T BE MIDNIGHT ALREADY!



CHARLES FROZE IN TERROR AS THE UNEXPECTED
WOMAN'S VOICE RANG OUT, ECHOING HOLLOWLY
AGAINST THE STONE WALLS...

WHO - WHO IS IT? WHO CALLS MY
NAME? I THOUGHT I WAS ALONE!
HOLD ON! I'LL LIGHT A MATCH!



YOUR HAND
TREMBLES!
WHAT DO YOU
FEAR, YOU
TREACHEROUS
DOG?

AT THE LAST STROKE OF MIDNIGHT, CHARLES'
FLASHLIGHT FLICKERED OUT, PLUNGING HIM INTO
BLACKNESS AND A SUDDEN PARALYZING FEAR!

THE LIGHT! IT'S GONE! I'VE
GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! THIS
PLACE GIVES ME THE CREEPS! IT
SMELLS LIKE DEATH AND DECAY!

AH, HERE
YOU ARE,
CHARLES
KEMP!



THE MATCH FLARED UP SUDDENLY AND BEFORE
CHARLES STOOD...



THE GHOST OF
ANNE BOLEYN!



IT'S A TRICK! A GHASTLY JOKE! THERE ARE NO GHOSTS!

THEN WHY DO YOU TREMBLE AND FLEE?

AS CHARLES RECOILED IN TERROR FROM THE REGAL APPEARITION, HE FELT THE GRASP OF HANDS ON HIS ARMS...

DO NOT RUN, CHARLES KEMP! STAY AND SATISFY YOUR SNEERING CURIOSITY ABOUT THE BLOODY TOWER!

YES, BE OUR GUEST! NOT OFTEN DOES A TRAITOROUS SWINE LIKE YOURSELF HAVE SUCH A NOBLE ESCORT!



WHO ARE YOU? HOW DO YOU KNOW ME? WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME?

WE KNOW YOU, CHARLES KEMP! YOU ARE A TRAITOR TO THE ENGLAND FOR WHICH WE LIVED AND DIED!



HEAR OUR NAMES AND RANK! YOU KNOW THE IDENTITY OF OUR FAIR ANNE. I AM THE DUKE OF NON-MOUTH, HANGED IN 1885! THIS IS THE DUKE OF CLARENCE, DROWNED IN 1478!

HANGED! DROWNED! HOW DARE YOU CALL ME TRAITOR? YOU ARE ALL TRAITORS!



TRAITORS TO ENGLAND? NEVER! I DIED TRYING TO PRESERVE ENGLAND FROM THE OPPRESSION OF JAMES II!



AND I WAS DROWNED IN A BUTT OF MALMSEY WINE BY ORDER OF MY OWN BROTHER, EDWARD IX, FOR REBELLING AGAINST HIS TYRANNY!



THE GHOSTS OF THE BLOODY TOWER DIED FIGHTING FOR THE GOOD OF ENGLAND! YOU, CHARLES KEMP, BETRAYED YOUR COUNTRY! YOU SHALL DIE A TRAITOR'S DEATH!

SHALL WE PROCEED TO THE COUNCIL CHAMBER FOR TRIAL, YOUR HIGHNESS?



YOU'RE ONLY GHOSTS AND I'M ALIVE! ALIVE, YOU HEAR! NO GHOST CAN HOLD ME, TRY ME OR HANG ME!

IT IS USELESS, THERE IS NO ESCAPE FOR YOU!

CHARLES TWISTED OUT OF THE CLUTCHING HANDS OF THE NOBLE WRAITHS AND RAN, HIS FOOTSTEPS ECHOING THE ACCUSATIONS OF ANNE BOLEYN...



THE FLEEING MAN, HOTLY PURSUED BY THE GHOSTLY FRO, FOLLOWED THE LABYRINTHINE CORRIDORS...



TURNING TO ESCAPE AGAIN, CHARLES WAS MET ON ALL SIDES BY THE HOSTILE FACES OF LONG, DEAD DEFENDERS OF ENGLAND.



THE MENACING HORDE OF PHANTOMS IN ANCIENT DRESS MOVED CLOSER AND CLOSER.



THE VAULTED COUNCIL ROOM OF THE TOWER OF LONDON WAS CROWDED WITH A GHOSTLY THRONG AS THE QUAKING CHARLES WAS LED TO THE DOCK...



SILENCE! LET THE TRIAL BEGIN! IS THE JURY READY?

CHARLES SHUDDERED IN HORROR AS HE SAW THE GRIM JURY...



YES, YOUR HIGHNESS, THE JURY IS READY!

THEN LET THE PROSECUTION BEGIN!

CHARLES' BENUMBED BRAIN FOUGHT TO DISBELIEVE THIS UNEARTHLY TRIAL, AS HE WATCHED THE DUKE OF MONMOUTH BEGIN...



CHARLES KEMP, THE DEFENDANT, STANDS ACCUSED OF HIGH TREASON! HE HAS FURNISHED INFORMATION TO ENGLAND'S ENEMY THAT HAS BROUGHT DEATH TO OUR LAND...

THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING! THIS IS THE TWENTIETH CENTURY! GHOSTS ARE ONLY IN OLD WIVES' TALES! BUT I CAN SEE THEM AND HEAR AND FEEL THEM!

AS THE SPECTRAL PROSECUTOR DRONE ON, CHARLES' TRAITOROUS SOUL QUAKED WITH FEAR AS HIS GUILT ROSE UP WITHIN HIM...



AND IN CONCLUSION, I DEMAND THAT THIS MAN BE FOUND GUILTY!

NO! NO! I'LL CONFESS! I'LL DO ANYTHING! ONLY LET ME GO!



THE BETRAYER OF A NATION BEGS FOR MERCY! THINK YOU, YOU CAN RIGHT THESE WRONGS?

HE DESERVES NO MERCY! WHAT IS THE VERDICT OF THE JURY?



STOP! STOP! LET ME EXPLAIN! I CAN...

SILENCE! THE COURT WAITS THE JURY'S VERDICT!

THE JURY FINDS CHARLES KEMP GUILTY!!

CHARLES' HEART CONVULSED WITH HORROR AS THE GHOST OF ANNE BOLEYN PRONOUNCED THE DREADFUL DECISION...



WE HEREBY SENTENCE YOU TO BE HANGED AT DAWN!

ALMOST UNCONSCIOUS FROM FRIGHT, CHARLES WAS DRAGGED FROM THE COUNCIL ROOM AND THROWN INTO A DUNGEON...



WE SHALL BE BACK AT DAWN!

HANGING'S TOO GOOD FOR HIM!

THERE'S NO WAY OUT! IF I SCREAM MAYBE SOMEONE WILL HEAR ME! HELP! HELP!



AS PRE-DAWN LIGHT FILTERED INTO THE TINY CELL, CHARLES HEARD A FAMILIAR SOUND THAT BROUGHT HIM BACK INTO REALITY...



THAT NOISE! A PLANE! A GERMAN BOMBER! I'M ALIVE AND THOSE PLANES ABOVE ARE REAL! GHOSTS CAN'T HANG A LIVE MAN! THIS IS ALL MY IMAGINATION!

HIGH IN THE SKY ABOVE, THE LAST GERMAN BOMBER OF THE RAID UNLOADED ITS BOMB RACKS AND HEADED FOR HOME...



GUESS I WAS OUT OF MY HEAD FOR A WHILE! STRAIN'S BEEN TOO MUCH FOR ME! THAT WHISTLING SOUND! THE PLANE, IT'S STILL DROPPING BOMBS! AWFUL CLOSE...



THE BOMB DESTROYED MY CELL AND RELEASED ME! AND I'M NOT HURT! IT'S A MIRACLE! AT LAST! THERE ARE TWO TOWER GUARDS! NOW I'M SAFE FROM THOSE FIENDISH GHOSTS! HELLO THERE!



NOTHING COULD HAVE LIVED THROUGH THAT SLABT! LUCKY THING NO ONE WAS DOWN HERE!

BUT I LIVED THROUGH IT! I WAS DOWN HERE! WHY DON'T YOU SPEAK TO ME? CAN'T YOU SEE ME? CAN'T YOU HEAR ME?

I FEEL A LITTLE CREEPY, DON'T YOU?



YEAH, AS IF SOMETHING COLD AND CLAMMY TOUCHED ME! WELL, DAWN'S BREAKING, WE'D BETTER GET BACK TO THE GUARD HOUSE!

**SUDDENLY
REALIZING
HIS MACABRE
FLIGHT,
CHARLES
PLEADED FOR
HUMAN
RECOGNITION,
BUT THE
GUARDS,
UNWARE
OF
HIS
PRESENCE,
STRODE
ON.**



THE GUARDS DIDN'T
KNOW I WAS HERE /
RIGHT NEXT TO THEM /
THEN I DIDN'T ESCAPE
THE BOMB / NOW I'M--
I'M ONE OF THEM,
THOSE . . .



YES, CHARLES
KEMP / NOW
YOU ARE
ONE OF US /
COME, WE
ARE
WAITING /

YOU AGAIN / I WON'T GO
WITH YOU / YOU CAN'T TAKE
ME / I'M ALIVE AND BREATHING,
I'M NOT DEAD /



AH, THIS SAD
WHEN THE NEW
ONES FIGHT IT /
COME, TIME
IS SHORT /

**FIGHTING WILDLY, CHARLES WAS DRAGGED
TO THE COURTYARD OF THE BLOODY TOWER . . .**



HURRY / LET'S
GET ON WITH IT!

LET THE
TRAITOR
BURN!

**AND THERE
BEFORE
A JEERING,
HOWLING
MOS OF
GHOSTLY
PATRIOTS,
HE
FACED
A JUSTICE
BEYOND
DEATH . . .**



BUT--BUT IF I'M ALREADY
DEAD, WHY--WHY MUST
I DIE AGAIN?



YOUR CRIMES
DESERVE MANY
DEATHS / YOU
SHALL PAY FOR
THEM THROUGH
ALL ETERNITY!

**AS THE RAYS OF
THE RISING SUN
SLANTED INTO
THE COURTYARD,
THE AVENGING
SPECTERS
OF THE
PAST
FADED WITH
THE NIGHT
SHADES,
LEAVING . .**



**HOURS LATER AS THE GUARDS AGAIN MADE THEIR
ROUNDS . . .**

EH, WHAT'S THIS / A GALLOWS /
AND A MAN HANGING FROM IT!



AYE / I TOLD
YOU I FELT
OUR GHOSTLY
NOBLES WERE IN
A FINE RAGE,
RAMPAGING AROUND
LAST NIGHT / SOME
WRETCH HAS PAID
FOR HIS SINS WITH A
FATE WORSE THAN
MORTAL DEATH!

THE END

A Hand of FATE Mystery

#17

IN 1907, PETER BAUER, A RESIDENT OF A SMALL BAVARIAN VILLAGE, FIGURED NONE OF THE MOST BAFFLING STORIES IN THE ANNALS OF THE SUPERNATURAL. BAUER CAME FROM A LONG LINE OF PUPPET MAKERS AND WAS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS TALENT. ONE NIGHT, AS HE AND HIS SON WORKED IN THE SHOP, THEY CAME UPON A BOX HIDDEN AWAY IN A DARK CORNER. THEY CURIOUSLY OPENED IT...

AN UNASSEMBLED DEVIL PUPPET! MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER CARVED THIS MANY YEARS AGO! IT IS SAID THAT THE MAN WHO PUTS IT TOGETHER WILL MEET A HORRIBLE FATE! BUT THAT'S JUST SUPERSTITION! I'M GOING TO ASSEMBLE IT!



BAUER WORKED THROUGH THE NIGHT AT HIS BENCH. FINALLY, THE DEVIL PUPPET WAS COMPLETED.

THERE'S SOMETHING ON MOUS ABOUT THIS CREATURE! I'M GOING TO DESTROY IT!

FATHER! THE DEVIL PUPPET IT'S MOVING!!

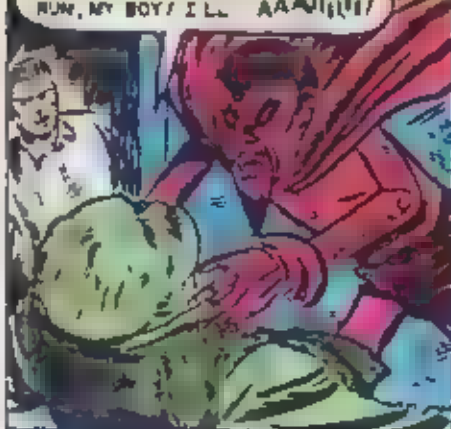


BEFORE BAUER COULD RAISE HIS AXE TO DESTROY THE MONSTER HE HAD RE-CREATED, IT LUNGED FOR THE CRAFTSMAN.

BAUER'S SON RACED OUT OF THE WORKSHOP AND TURNED TO BEHOLD AN AWESOME SIGHT.

HE HA HA HA HA

AAARRRGH.



WHEN THE BATTLE ENDED, BAUER'S SON RETURNED TO THE SHOP. HE SAW THE BODY OF HIS DEAD FATHER SPRAWLED ON THE FLOOR. PARTS OF THE DEVIL PUPPET LAY STREWN ABOUT THE WRECKED ROOM. AND THE FACE OF THE DEVIL WAS TWISTED INTO A SMILING GRINACE!



THE PIECES OF THE PUPPET WERE GATHERED UP AND BURNED TO ASHES BY THE UNFORTUNATE WOOD CARVER'S SON. IT NO LONGER COULD BE ASSEMBLED TO CREATE HAVOC! BUT THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE STILL LIVE IN DREAD THAT ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE BAUER FAMILY MAY ONE DAY CREATE ANOTHER DEVIL PUPPET!

THE END

CARL BRANDON TRIED TO CHEAT FATE BY RELYING HIS LIFE OVER AGAIN THREE TIMES BUT NO MATTER WHAT HE DID, HE COULD NEVER HIDE THE CANCER THAT ATE INTO HIS SOUL - THE CANCER OF OVERPOWERING SPEED THAT TURNED HIM INTO A SCREAMING, SHRIeking CREATURE WHILE

XII THE CLOCK OF DOOM STRIKES LOUD!

YOU'LL NEVER GET ME / I'LL TRICK ALL OF YOU YET / I'LL GO BACK INTO MY OWN PAST!

IT IS HOPELESS, CARL BRANDON! NOTHING CAN SAVE YOU FROM THE FATE THAT AWAITS YOU BELOW / YOUR HOUR IS AT HAND!

CARL BRANDON HAD BEEN A NOBO MOST OF HIS LIFE - A SELF SH, MISERLY MAN - AND NOW HIS COMPANIONS GATHERED ABOUT HIS DYING, SHRIVELED BODY...

WE WUZ NO GOOD THAT BRANDON / HE NEVER HELPED ANYONE / I'VE TORE UP ALL THE FLOOR-BOARDS HERE / NOT A RED CENT!

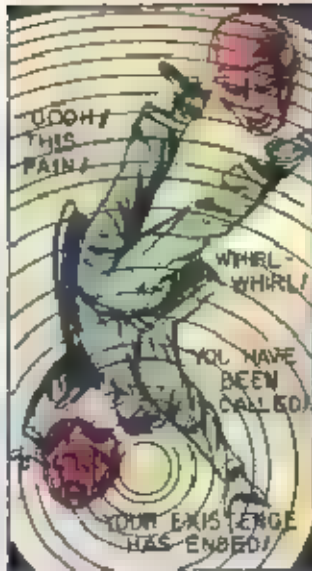
WONDER WHERE HE HID HIS CASH? PTANY? LOOK AT HIM! I HOPE HE ROTS WHERE HE'S GOIN'!

HEY! E'S DYING! OL' BRANDON IS FINALLY KICKIN' THE BUCKET!

YEAH! GOOD RIDDANCE, I SAY!



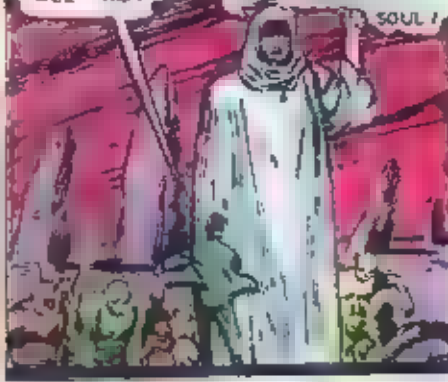
THIS WAS CARL BRANDON'S LAST MOMENTS-ONLY SECONDS LEFT TO HIM AND IN THOSE PRECIOUS MOMENTS, HE HEARD SOMETHING



BACK THROUGH MILLIONS OF TIDY-CURRENTS, HE SPED THROUGH MYRIAD SWIRLS AND BLINDING UNIVERSES INTO THE BEYOND-- AND TO FATE!

W WHERE AM I?
WHAT HAPPENED?
I I'M DREAMING
ALL THIS!

NO, CARL BRANDON!
YOU HAVE BEEN SUM-
MONED TO WITNESS
THE FUTURE OF YOUR
SOUL!



WORK-WORK-WORK WE
WORK AND KEEP THESE
CLOCKS FOR ALL
ETERNITY?

CLOCKS /MILLIONS
OF THEM/WHAT IS
ALL THIS?



YOU THERE / YOU IN THE
MOOD / WHAT KIND OF JOKE
IS THIS? YOU CAN'T TREAT
ME THIS WAY / I WAS KING
OF THE ROBOS!

YOU ARE IN THE CHAM-
BER OF DEATH. FOOL SH
MORTAL FINESE CLOCKS
ARE THE LIFE SPANS
OF ALL THOSE UPON
EARTH / AND YOU, CARL
BRANDON HAVE ONLY
SECONDS LEFT OF
EX STENCE!



YOU COULD HAVE LED A USEFUL LIFE / BUT
YOU LIVED ONLY FOR GREED / SO NOW, YOU ARE
DOOMED / BEHOLD-- THERE ARE THREE DOORS
TO LIFE / EACH WAS OPEN TO YOU!



THEN I'LL TAKE ONE OF THEM!
I STILL HAVE TIME / THAT MAKES
ME STRONGER THAN ALL THE
GARGOYLES AND DEMONS HERE!
LIFE IS STILL MORE POWERFUL
THAN DEATH!

EEEEEE /
HE ESCAPES (IS)
AFTER HIM,
BROTHERS!



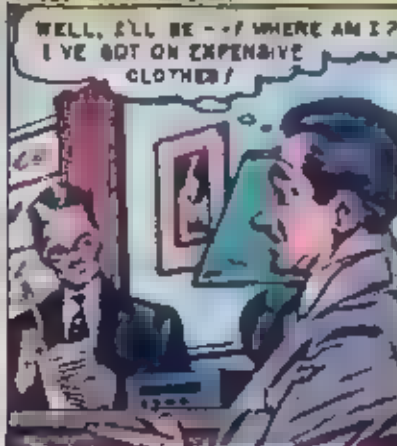
NO! LET HIM GO! EACH DOOR
MAY MEAN A LIFETIME TO HIM PER-
HAPS-- BUT TO US, IT IS JUST ONE
SECOND! HE WILL FIND THAT NO
MATTER WHAT HE DOES, IF HE
IS GREEDY, HE WILL
BE BACK!



I GOT TO OPEN THIS
DOOR! WHAT'S IT READ?
MONEY! HAS THAT?
WHAT I WANT! MONEY--
AND A NEW CHANCE
AT LIFE!



THE POWERFUL DOOR SWUNG BACK
AND THE HOBBO FOUND HIMSELF IN A
WORLD OF UTTER MAGNIFICENCE
SEATED BEHIND AN ORNATE DESK
FILED WITH PAPERS.



WELL, I'LL BE --? WHERE AM I?
I'VE GOT ON EXPENSIVE
CLOTHING!

SIR--SHALL I BUY MORE
STOCK FOR YOU? STEEL IS
RIDING ON THE MARKET AT
200 A SHARE?



UH--YEAH--I
MEAN--SURE 'SO
AHEAD AND BUY!

SO THIS IS
WHAT THAT SIGN
MEANT ON THAT
DOOR! MONEY!
AND I GOT IT
ALL!

SURE! BUY ALL YOU
CAN! I WANT ALL I CAN
LAY MY HANDS ON!
BUY EVERYTHING!
EVERYTHING!



AND IN THE MONTHS THAT FOLLOWED, THE FORMER HOBBO
FOUND HIMSELF A MILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST WITH ENOUGH
MONEY TO BUY A SULTAN'S REALM! HE LIVED! HE SPENT
MONEY LIKE WATER!



FACTORIES, HOUSES, ESTATES, A HUNDRED AND
ONE INVESTMENTS FELL INTO HIS HANDS. COAL
MINES, GOLD MINES-- ALL SORTS OF VENTURES
BECAME HIS-- READY FOR IMMEDIATE AND
JUICY PLUCKING.

BUT YOU CAN'T ORDER
THE MEN TO DIG DEEPER
WITHOUT SAFETY DEVICES.
MR. BRANCO? IT'S
NOT SAFE!



DON'T TELL ME
WHAT TO DO! I
NEED MORE
PRODUCTION! MORE
COAL-- MORE
VOLUME! I'M
SPENDING MILLIONS!

JUST LET ANYONE
CALL ME WHEN NOW!
HA, HA

BUT SO BLINDED WAS CARL BRANDON TO HIS GREED FOR MAKING MONEY, THAT HE HADN'T SPENT A FEW THOUSAND TO SECURE HIS MILLIONS THE INEVITABLE OCCURRET!



GET OUT OF THE WAY
WATCH OUT!! IT'S A
CAVE IN!
YAAAAA!

AND NOW A TREMBLING BRANDON PEERED OUT OF HIS SHUTTERED WINDOW AT THE SCREAMING, ANGRY MOB OUTSIDE HIS WINDOW-- COME FOR REVENGE.



YOU MONEY HUNGRY RAT!
YOU'RE THE CAUSE OF
ALL THIS!

YOU KILLED
MY HUSBAND!
MURDERER!

THE WEB DRAWS
TIGHTER ABOUT
CARL BRANDON
TIGHTER AND MORE
CONVINCINGLY!

I'M GONNA KILL YOU, BRANDON!
JUST AS YOU KILLED MY BROTHER
LYING DOWN THERE UNDER COAL
AND ROCK!



DON'T BE A FOOL!
I'LL GIVE YOU A
MILLION DOLLARS IF
YOU PUT DOWN THAT
GUN!

DON'T DO IT!
DON'T!!



LET'S SEE
YOU TAKE YOUR
DOUGH WITH
YOU NOW, YOU
LEECH!

ONCE MORE, THE SOUL OF CARL BRANDON WHIRLED THROUGH TIME AND SPACE



COME BACK TO
US MORTAL!
WE AWAIT YOU!
HA, HA!

OWHH--
WHIRLING
AGAIN.
I'VE
FAILED...
FAILED

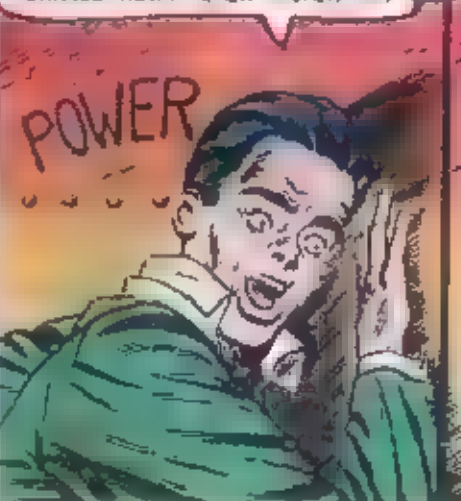
BEHOLD! HE IS ABOUT TO
ENTER THE SECOND DOOR! LET
US TEAR OUT HIS BLACK
HEART AND CLEANSE
HIS SOUL!



STOP! LET HIM
LIVE OUT HIS
SECOND EXISTENCE
ALSO! HE HAS
NOT YET LEARNED!



GASP! GASP! THIS IS THE DOOR I
SHOULD'VE PICKED! I'LL HAVE ANOTHER
CHANCE NOW! OPEN! OPEN!



THE DOOR OF POWER SWUNG OPEN, AND BRANDON FOUND HIMSELF IN A LARGE HALL FILLED WITH PROMINENT MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. HE WAS EVIDENTLY IN A SMALL EUROPEAN COUNTRY.

I WONDER WHO I AM NOW! CAN'T I AFFORD ANY MORE MISTAKES? I WON'T HOARD MONEY - AND I WON'T MAKE IT EITHER IF I CAN HELP IT!

NOW WE WILL HEAR FROM OUR DISTINGUISHED PRIME MINISTER!



SO THAT'S WHO I AM -- AND HERE'S MY SPEECH WELL -- I'LL GIVE THEM ALL SOMETHING TO REMEMBER

AND I DONATE ALL MY PERSONAL WEALTH AND FORTUNE TO THE NEEDY AND THE UNFORTUNATE! FOR MYSELF, I WANT NOTHING!

BRAVO!
BRAVO!



BRANDON DID NOT HAVE A CENT TO HIS NAME -- BUT HE HAD SOMETHING GREATER -- POWER -- FOR PEOPLE EVERYWHERE GAVE HIM THE RESPECT AND HOMAGE DUE A GREAT DIPLOMAT

LONG LIVE PRIME MINISTER BRANDON! HUZAH!

HE HAS FED AND CLOTHED OUR LITTLE ONES THROUGH HIS GENEROSITY!



BUT THE GREED WITHIN HIS SOUL ENVELOPED HIM ONCE MORE. NOW HE FACED THE DECISION OF ORDERING HIS ARMIES TO ATTACK AN ENEMY THREATENING HIS PEOPLE

IF I ACCEPT THIS OFFER, I'LL HAVE ALL THE POWER I WANT IN THE WORLD!

YOU SEE CARL BRANDON YOU CANNOT CHANGE YOUR DESTINY!



AND A FEW NIGHTS AFTERWARDS, AT A SECRET COUNCIL WITH ENEMY REPRESENTATIVES.

WE MUST HAVE YOUR ANSWER NOW! WE WILL GIVE YOU THE THRONE OF YOUR COUNTRY IF YOU LET US WIN ON THE BATTLEFIELD

YOU MEAN, IF I KEEP BACK MY ARMIES FROM YOUR OWN INVASION FORCE, YOU WILL MAKE ME KING? A VERY DIFFICULT CHOICE, GENTLEMEN.

BUT I'VE THOUGHT IT OVER -- AND I'M YOUR MAN!

GOOD! YOU HAVE THE THRONE FROM THIS MOMENT ON!



BUT TREACHERY KNOWS NO CONTRACT -- AND SOON AFTERWARDS

ORDER A GENERAL RETREAT! THE ENEMY HAS INVADED OUR INNER DEFENCES!

THANKS TO THAT ACCURSED PRIME MINISTER, WE SHALL ALL SUFFER NOW FOR HIS CORRUPT STATESMANSHIP!



CARL BRANDON RECEIVED HIS POWER - BUT AN AROUSED
POPULACE BROUGHT VIOLENCE AND DEATH FOR HIS TREACHERY!

DEATH TO THE TRAITOR!
STONE HIM TO DEATH!

A
FREE

BLAM

BLAM!



WELCOME
BACK TO OUR REALM
CARL BRANDON

YAAAAH!
THEY KILLED
ME AGAIN!

YES, AND YOU
HAVE RETURNED AS
BEFORE

WE'LL-- I STILL HAVE
THE THIRD DOOR.
GET AWAY FROM
ME-- OR I'LL
ASHH! IT'S
OPENING!

LEAD OUT
YOUR
MISERABLE LITTLE
LIFE AGAIN, FOOLISH
MORTAL! YOU HAVE
OPENED THE LAST
DOOR-- THE DOOR
MARKED LOVE!!

LOVE



THIS TIME CARL NO LONGER DESIRED
POWER OR MONEY HE GAVE EVERY-
THING AWAY HE EVEN REFUSED
ADVANCEMENT AND NOW HE
SEARCHED FRANTICALLY
FOR LOVE

I'LL ASK HER TO MARRY ME!
I'LL HAVE HER LOVE AND SO
CHEAT MY FATE! I CAN'T BE
DAMNED FOR LOVING,
CAN I?



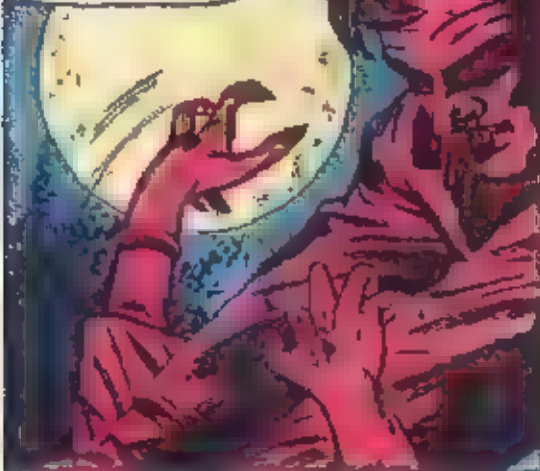
BUT CARL BRANDON'S OVER-
WHELMING GREED FOR ANY OBJECT
OF HIS CHOICE, BROUGHT HIS OWN
DOWNFALL.

NO! NO! YOU'RE COLD, CRUEL!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT MADE YOU
THINK YOU COULD HAVE MY LOVE!
I'M GOING TO
MARRY
TED!

WE'LL SEE
ABOUT THAT!



IF I WON'T HAVE YOUR
LOVE, NO ONE ELSE WILL!
I'LL HAVE YOU-- OR
YOU WON'T LIVE!



THE GIRL SANK WITHOUT A SOUND, AND DIED IN THE
BLOSSOM OF HER YOUTH. SUDDENLY, THE BUSHES
RUSTLED, AND...

I SAW EVERYTHING, CARL! WE OFTEN
WALKED THROUGH THE PARK AT NIGHT,
DREAMING OF OUR HAPPINESS TOGETHER.
I WAS TO MEET HER HERE-- BUT YOU--
YOU KILLED HER! AND NOW
I'M GOING TO
KILL YOU!

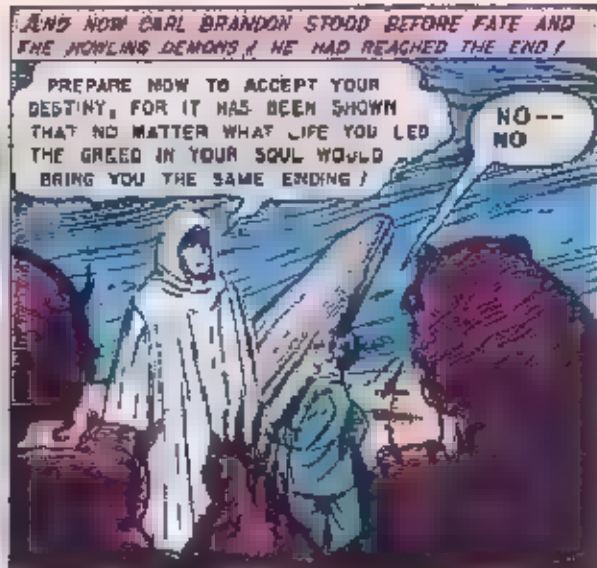
NO, TED!
IT--IT WAS
ALL A
MISTAKE! I
WAS BESIDE
MYSELF!!





AAAAGHHH!

YOU HAD TO WIN HER LOVE, DIDN'T YOU? YOU COULDN'T FIND ANOTHER GIRL--ONLY HER! WELL YOUR GREEDY SOUL CAN GO TO HADES!!



AND NOW CARL BRANDON STOOD BEFORE FATE AND THE HOWLING DEMONS! HE HAD REACHED THE END!

PREPARE NOW TO ACCEPT YOUR DESTINY, FOR IT HAS BEEN SHOWN THAT NO MATTER WHAT LIFE YOU LED THE GREED IN YOUR SOUL WOULD BRING YOU THE SAME ENDING!

NO-- NO

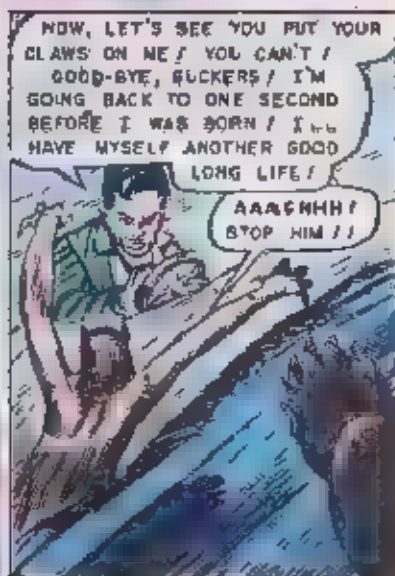


SOON THE BELL WILL CHIME THE CLOSE OF YOUR EARTHLY EXISTENCE! BEHOLD--ALREADY THE SECOND-HAND APPROACHES TWELVE!

THAT'S IT! I HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE! I'LL FOOL THEM YET!

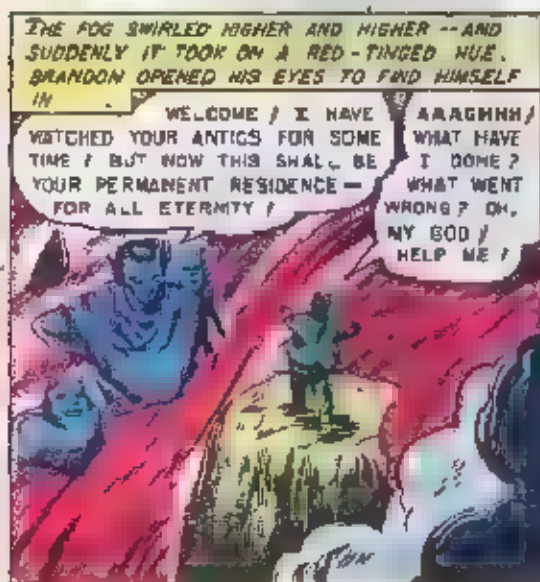


BUT I'LL TRICK YOU YET! HA! HA! I'M PULLING THESE DIALS YEARS BACK INTO THE PAST! I'LL BE BORN AGAIN!



NOW, LET'S SEE YOU PUT YOUR CLAWS ON ME! YOU CAN'T! GOOD-BYE, SUCKERS! I'M GOING BACK TO ONE SECOND BEFORE I WAS BORN! I'LL HAVE MYSELF ANOTHER GOOD LONG LIFE!

AAAAGHHH! STOP HIM!!



THE FOG SWIRLED HIGHER AND HIGHER--AND SUDDENLY IT TOOK ON A RED-TINGED HUE. BRANDON OPENED HIS EYES TO FIND HIMSELF IN

WELCOME! I HAVE WATCHED YOUR ANTICS FOR SOME TIME! BUT NOW THIS SHALL BE YOUR PERMANENT RESIDENCE--FOR ALL ETERNITY!

AAAAGHHH! WHAT HAVE I DONE? WHAT WENT WRONG? OH, MY GOD! HELP ME!



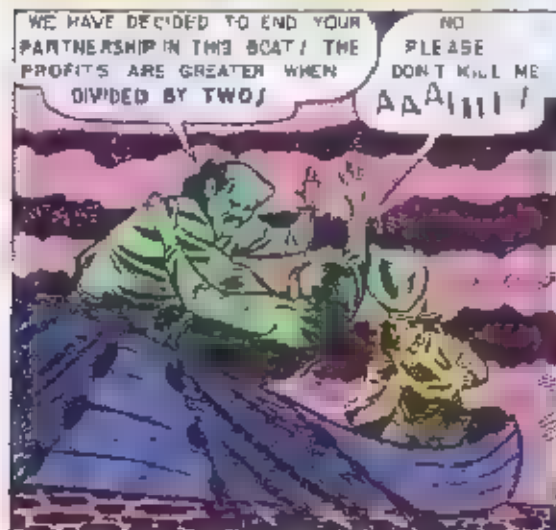
THUS, CARL BRANDON CAUSED HIS OWN DOOM, FOR BY PUSHING BACK TIME TO ONE SECOND BEFORE HIS BIRTH, HE ERASED HIMSELF OUT OF EXISTENCE AS IT WAS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF FATE!

THE END

A Hand of FATE Mystery

#18

THE STRANGE TALE OF DEATH AND MYSTERY SHROUDS THE SMALL FISHING VILLAGE ON THE COAST OF MEXICO. IT ALL BEGAN ONE DAY WHEN THREE MEN SET OUT IN A FISHING BOAT HEADED INTO THE GULF TO SPREAD THEIR FISHING NETS BY NIGHTFALL, DISASTER OVERTOOK ONE OF THE MEN OUT IN THE MIDDLE SEA.



WE HAVE DECIDED TO END YOUR PARTNERSHIP IN THIS BOAT! THE PROFITS ARE GREATER WHEN DIVIDED BY TWO!

NO PLEASE DON'T KILL ME AGAIN!!

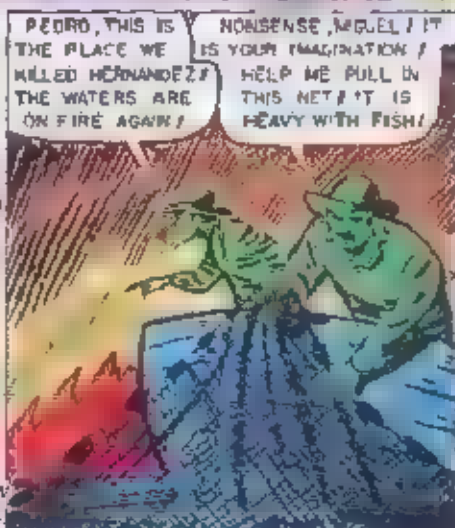


THE KILLERS TOSSED THEIR DEAD VICTIM INTO THE SEA, BUT SUDDENLY A STRANGE GLOW COVERED THE WATER.

LOOK PEDRO! THE WATER! IT MUST BE A BAD OMEN!

A FREAK OF NATURE, NIGUEL! THE SHARKS WILL TAKE CARE OF HERNANDEZ'S BODY!

THE TWO MEN RETURNED TO THE VILLAGE AND TOLD THE AUTHORITIES HERNANDEZ HAD FALLEN OVERBOARD AND WAS KILLED BY SHARKS! THE DEATH WAS CALLED ACCIDENTAL, AND THE TWO MEN RESUMED THEIR FISHING. THE VISION OF THE GLOWING, EERIE WATERS STILL HUNG HEAVILY ON NIGUEL'S MIND.



PEDRO, THIS IS THE PLACE WE KILLED HERNANDEZ! THE WATERS ARE ON FIRE AGAIN!

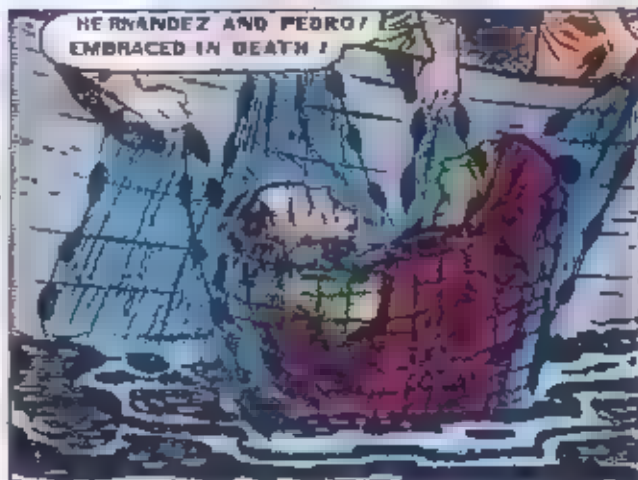
NONSENSE, NIGUEL! IT IS YOUR IMAGINATION! HELP ME PULL IN THIS NET! IT IS HEAVY WITH FISH!



SUDDENLY... HERNANDEZ!

I'VE COME BACK FOR YOU! NOW WE CAN BE PARTNERS IN DEATH!

THE POWERFUL, CLAMMY ARMS GRASPED THE TERRIFIED PEDRO AND DRAGGED HIM INTO THE SEA. NIGUEL ROWED AWAY FROM THE GHOSTLY SCENE. A MENTAL WRECK HIS MIND HAD SNAPPED, HE REACHED PORT AND TOLD AN INCOHERENT STORY OF WHAT HE HAD SEEN. THE VILLAGERS SAILED TO THE SPOT IN THE GULF AND CAST THEIR NETS INTO THE WATERS. WHEN THE NETS WERE PULLED IN...



HERNANDEZ AND PEDRO! EMBRACED IN DEATH!

THOUGH THIS STRANGE EVENT OCCURRED ALMOST TWENTY YEARS AGO, NO EXPLANATION OF IT COULD EVER BE FOUND. ANOTHER TALE IN THE ANNALS OF THE SUPERNATURAL!

THE END

THE BLACK CURSE OF Rhan Giva

THIS IS THE ROOM,
DOCTOR LITHEHCOURT
MR WINGATE IS
IN BED

I'LL GO
RIGHT TO
HIM!

OH, DOCTOR I'M SO GLAD
YOU'VE COME! I... I'VE BEEN
SO WORRIED!

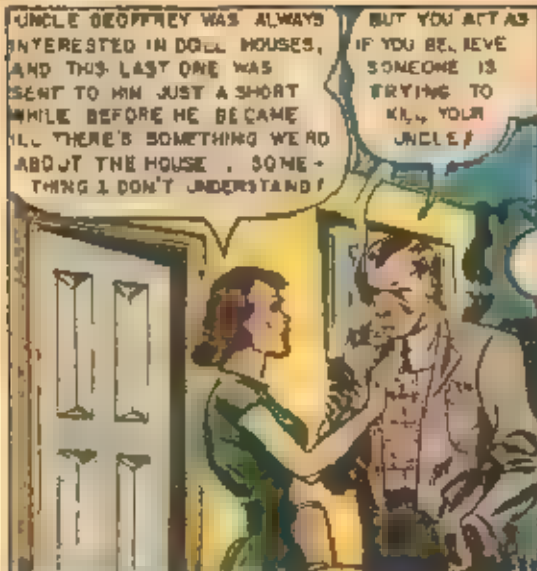
LONDON IS A LONG WAY FROM THE MYSTERIES OF INDIA, BUT THE UNKNOWN FORCES OF DARKNESS ARE NOT LIMITED BY DISTANCE. THAT WAS WHAT GEOFFREY WINGATE LEARNED WHEN HE TRAVELLED FROM INDIA, ONLY TO FIND THAT HORROR HAD BEEN HIS COMPANION... AND STRANGE POWERS WERE SAPPING AWAY HIS STRENGTH!

W-HOW IS HE,
DOCTOR?
HE'S BEEN
SO WEAK!

I CAN'T RIGHTFULLY SAY THERE
DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANYTHING
ORGANICALLY WRONG WITH YOUR
UNCLE! IT'S VERY STRANGE!

WHERE DID TH'S COME FROM?
IT'S ONE OF THE MOST PERFECT
DOLL HOUSES I'VE EVER
SEEN!

IT... IT'S ONE
OF THE THINGS I
WANT TO TALK TO
YOU ABOUT. IF
RHAN GIVA ISN'T
AROUND TO
LISTEN!

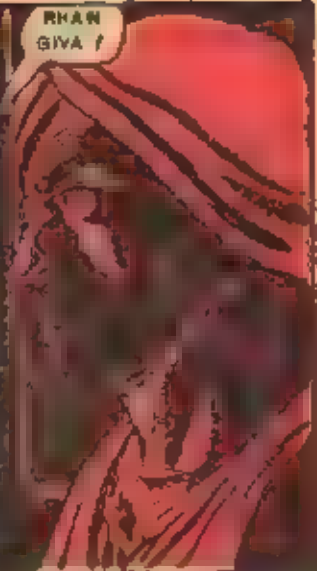


UNCLE GEOFFREY WAS ALWAYS INTERESTED IN DOLL HOUSES, AND THIS LAST ONE WAS SENT TO HIM JUST A SHORT WHILE BEFORE HE BECAME ILL. THERE'S SOMETHING WEIRD ABOUT THE HOUSE. SOMETHING I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

BUT YOU ACT AS IF YOU BELIEVE SOMEONE IS TRYING TO KILL YOUR UNCLE!



THAT'S RIGHT! AND I THINK THE KILLER IS



RHAN GIVA!



HELEN WINGATE RECOILED AS THOUGH IN DEADLY FEAR, AS SOON AS SHE SAW RHAN GIVA THEN SHE DARTED PAST HIM OUT TO ANOTHER PART OF THE OLD HOUSE.

MRS WINGATE!

SOONER OR LATER I MUST TALK TO YOU



MR WINGATE! YOU MUSTN'T EXCITE YOURSELF!

I I HAVEN'T MUCH TIME! I MUST WARN YOU FOR HELEN'S SAKE! IT'S ABOUT RHAN GIVA



GIVA IS DONE! BUT YOU STILL SHOULDN'T EXCITE YOURSELF!

BUT BUT THERE'S SO MUCH TO TELL ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME! IT ALL STARTED SOME YEARS AGO WHILE I WAS STILL IN INDIA



I WAS IN CHARGE OF A SPECIAL FORCE ASSIGNED THE DUTY OF STAMPING OUT A REVIVAL GROUP ACCUSED OF PRACTICING THE BLACK ARTS.

THEY ARE ALL INSIDE NOW IF WE MOVE SUDDENLY, WE'LL SURPRISE THEM AND TAKE THEM ALL! GOOD!



MEANWHILE, INSIDE THE OLD BUILDING

OH BLACK ONE! REVEAL YOURSELF TO US IN ALL YOUR EVIL MAJESTY!

REVEAL REVEAL!

REVEAL REVEAL!

SUDDENLY

ALL RIGHT! GRAB ALL OF THEM! LET NONE ESCAPE!

THE POLICE! WE ARE BETRAYED!



WE THREW THE WHOLE LOT INTO HELL, AND I WOULD HAVE CONSIDERED THE JOB COMPLETED, IF IT WEREN'T FOR HELEN, MY NIECE. SUDDENLY WITHOUT CAUSE SHE WAS TAKEN! ALL DOCTORS COULDN'T HELP.

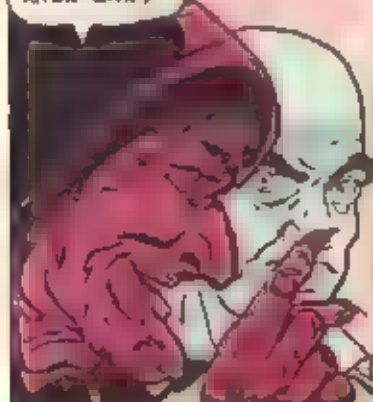
I'LL COME AGAIN TOMORROW, WINGATE, BUT I CAN'T HOLD OUT MUCH HOPE!

BAH! MAY I TALK WITH YOU FOR ONE MOMENT?



THERE IS ONE MAN WHO CAN HELP YOUR NIECE! HE IS ONE OF THOSE WHO WERE ARRESTED RHAN GIVA!

I'M WILLING TO DO ANYTHING! I'LL GO SEE HIM AT ONCE!



AND SOON

IF I CAN CURE YOUR NIECE, I MUST HAVE A PROMISE FROM YOU! YOU MUST ARRANGE TO HAVE ME RELEASED, AND THEN YOU MUST KEEP ME ON AS YOUR SERVANT AS LONG AS YOU SHALL LIVE!

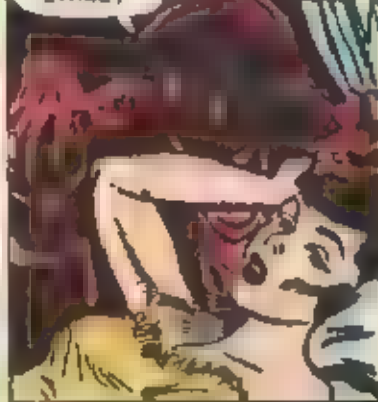
YES... YES... I PROMISE! ANYTHING!



RELEASING RHAN GIVA WAS SIMPLE, AND HE WAS SOON AT MY HOUSE.

RELEASE HER FROM THE SPELL, BRING HER BACK TO THE LIVING!

OHMMMM!



UNCLE, UNCLE!

HELEN! YOU ARE ALL RIGHT AGAIN!

DO NOT FORGET YOUR PROMISE, MR WINGATE! I STAY WITH YOU!



RHAN GIVA HAS BEEN WITH ME EVER SINCE BUT I FEEL THAT HE WAS WAITING ONLY UNTIL I HAD RETURNED TO ENGLAND TO EXACT VENGENCE FROM ME! I DON'T KNOW HOW BUT I THINK THE DOLL HOUSE HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT.





THE...
DOLL...
HOUSE

MR WINGATE/
MR WINGATE!

AS HER UNCLE COLLAPSED
INTO THE LONGEST SLEEP
OF ALL, HELEN WINGATE
BURST INTO THE ROOM AS
THOUGH FOREWARNED BY
SOME SIXTH SENSE...

UNCLE/
UNCLE!

I, I'M SORRY,
MISS WINGATE!
YOUR UNCLE
IS DEAD!



HE DIDN'T
HAVE
TO DIE!

TRY TO BE
CALM, MISS
WINGATE! IT
WAS BEYOND
OUR CONTROL!

YES
BEYOND
YOUR
CONTROL!



YOU! GET OUT OF
HERE! I DON'T
WANT TO SEE YOU
IN THIS HOUSE
ANY LONGER!

AM BUT YOU ARE WRONG,
MISS HELEN! I SHALL STAY
HERE! YOU SEE, THE HOUSE
IS MINE! YOUR UNCLE
LEFT IT TO ME!



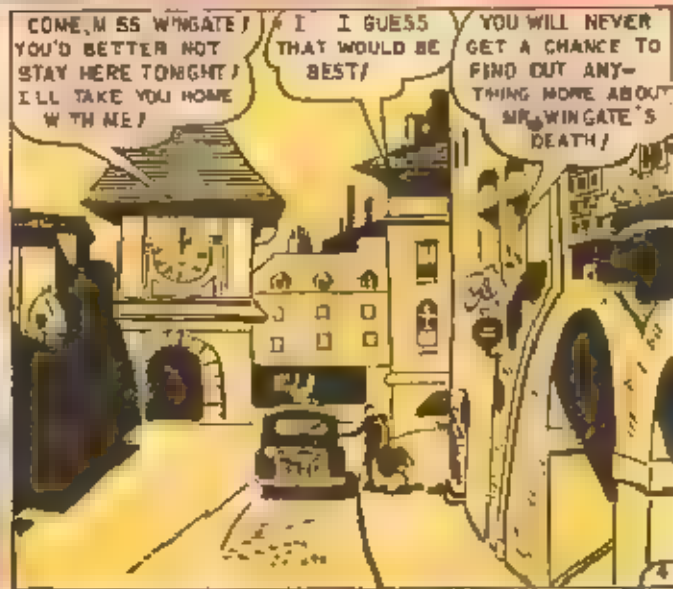
IT ISN'T TRUE! YOU'RE LYING!
I'M SURE YOU KILLED MY
UNCLE, AND I WON'T STOP
UNTIL I'VE PROVED IT!

WHY? WHAT MAKES
YOU SAY THAT?
DO YOU KNOW
ANYTHING?



MAYBE WE DO FOR
INSTANCE MR
WINGATE TOLD ME
SOMETHING ABOUT
THE DOLL HOUSE
AND

THE DOLL HOUSE!
THERE IS NOTHING
WRONG WITH IT!
SOMEONE SENT IT
TO MR WINGATE
AND THAT WAS
ALL!



COME, MISS WINGATE!
YOU'D BETTER NOT
STAY HERE TONIGHT!
I'LL TAKE YOU HOME
WITH ME!

I I GUESS
THAT WOULD BE
BEST!

YOU WILL NEVER
GET A CHANCE TO
FIND OUT ANY-
THING MORE ABOUT
MR. WINGATE'S
DEATH!

THE INTENSITY OF QIAN QIAN'S FURY SEEMED TO FILL THE NIGHT AIR ALL AROUND THEM AS THEY DROVE AWAY INTO THE DARKNESS. THEN AFTER THEY'D GONE A SHORT DISTANCE

WHAT'S WRONG, DOCTOR? WHY ARE YOU SLOWING DOWN?

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE CAR. I'LL HAVE TO PULL OVER TO THE CURB BEFORE WE GET STUCK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET.

AFTER A FEW VAIN ATTEMPTS TO FIND THE TROUBLE

I GUESS THERE'S NOTHING FOR US TO DO BUT LEAVE IF HERE AND WALK THE REST OF THE WAY!

I I'M FRIGHTENED! IT SEEMS SO TERRIBLY COLD AND THIS NEIGHBORHOOD LOOKS SO... SO EVIL!

THEY HAD WALKED BUT A FEW STEPS WHEN

CAN SOMEBODY HELP ME? PLEASE PLEASE!

OVER THIS WAY! WHAT IS IT?

I I NEED A DOCTOR BADLY! IN MY HOUSE BACK THERE!

YOU'RE IN LUCK, MISS! I AM A DOCTOR! GO AHEAD AND WE'LL FOLLOW YOU!

RIGHT IN HERE!

I I DON'T LIKE THIS PLACE, DOCTOR! THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT IT THAT SEEMS FAMILIAR!

FUNNY I FEEL THE SAME WAY AS THOUGH I'D SEEN IT BEFORE!

ONCE INSIDE THE HOUSE, THE FEELING OF FAMILIARITY DEEPENED AND A SENSE OF COMING EVIL GREW LARGER.

RIGHT UPSTAIRS! YOUR PATIENT IS IN THE BEDROOM AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS.

EVEN THIS ROOM! I KNOW IT FROM SOMEWHERE!

LEAVE QUICKLY!

THAT MUST BE THE PATIENT!

THE DOCTOR AND HELEN WINGATE APPROACHED THE BED, NEVER EXPECTING THE HORROR AND MYSTERY THAT THEY SUDDENLY FACED

W-WINGATE / IT... IT CAN'T BE / YOU'RE DEAD... IN YOUR OWN HOUSE... MILES AWAY FROM HERE!

DON'T YOU SEE? GNA TRAPPED YOU, TOO!



UNCLE GNA
Y-YOU'RE REALLY ALIVE!

NO NO. YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND / DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT THIS PLACE IS? WHERE YOU ARE? LOOK AROUND YOU!



HELEN LOOKED AROUND THE ROOM SLOWLY, AND A LIGHT OF COMPREHENSION FILLED HER EYES, BRINGING UNMISTAKABLE FEAR...

IT'S THE DOLL HOUSE... THE DOLL HOUSE IN YOUR ROOM BESIDE YOUR BED! WE'RE IN IT!

RHAN GNA MUST HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TRANSPORT US HERE THROUGH SOME BLACK ART!



WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT... AND TAKE YOU WITH US!

IT'S TOO LATE FOR ME, DOCTOR! FOR ALL WORDLY PURPOSES I AM DEAD! BUT YOU AND HELEN... YOU MUST ESCAPE WHILE THERE'S STILL A CHANCE!



HE'S RIGHT / THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO...

BUT...



THEY RUSHED OUT INTO THE HALLWAY, WHEN SUDDENLY

RHAN GNA / YOU ARE HERE IN THE DOLL HOUSE, TOO!

YES TO SEE THAT YOU TWO NEVER ESCAPE!



THE DOCTOR MOVED WITH UNEXPECTED SPEED

NOT IF I CAN DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT!

AARGH!



THE STRUGGLE WAS FIERCE FOR THE DOCTOR KNEW THAT MORE THAN HIS LIFE DEPENDED UPON THE OUTCOME! RHAN GVA'S STRENGTH WAS UNBELIEVABLY GREAT.

YOU SHALL STAY HERE IN THE DOLL HOUSE FOREVER BOTH OF YOU!



YOU DEVIL...

THEN WITH HIS LAST BIT OF REMAINING STRENGTH



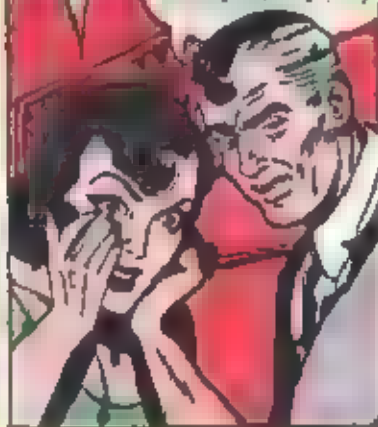
THERE!

UGH!

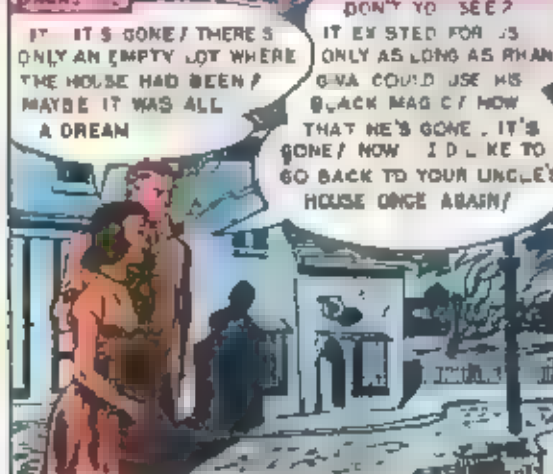
GOXY!

H-HE'S SO HORRIBLE... SO HORRIBLE!

BUT HE'S DEAD... AND HE CAN'T HURT US ANY LONGER! LET'S GET AWAY FROM HERE NOW... AS QUICKLY AS WE CAN!



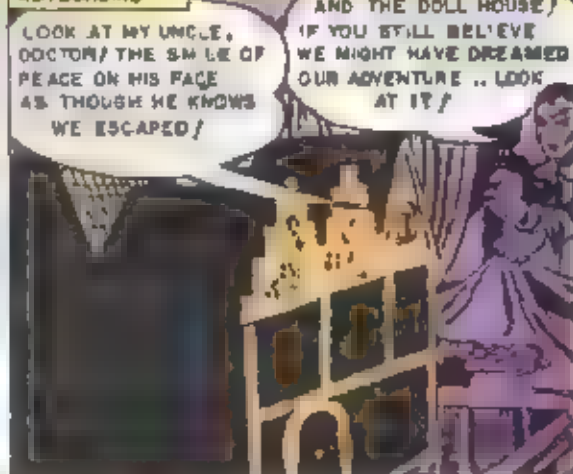
DOCTOR LITHEWORTH RUSHED HELEN WINGATE OUT OF THE HOUSE OF EVIL AND INTO THE DARK STREET THEN WHEN THEY TURNED TO LOOK BACK...



IT'S GONE! THERE'S ONLY AN EMPTY LOT WHERE THE HOUSE HAD BEEN! MAYBE IT WAS ALL A DREAM

DON'T YOU SEE? IT EXISTED FOR US ONLY AS LONG AS RHAN GVA COULD USE HIS BLACK MAGIC NOW THAT HE'S GONE... IT'S GONE! NOW I'D LIKE TO GO BACK TO YOUR UNCLE'S HOUSE ONCE AGAIN!

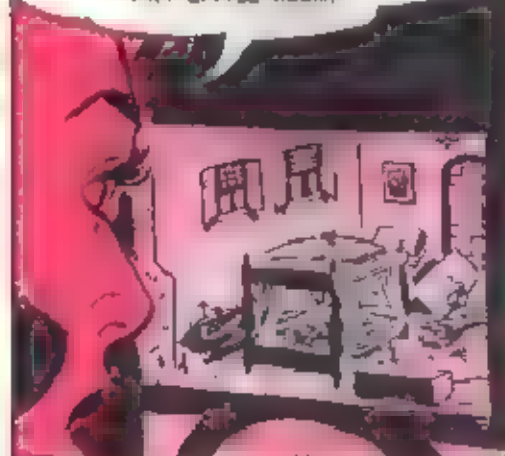
THEY RUSHED BACK TO GEOFFREY WINGATE'S HOUSE THERE WAS NO SIGN OF RHAN GVA BUT SOMETHING ELSE WAS DISCOVERED EVEN MORE ASTOUNDING



LOOK AT MY UNCLE, DOCTOR! THE SMILE OF PEACE ON HIS FACE AS THOUGH HE KNOWS WE ESCAPED!

AND THE DOLL HOUSE! IF YOU STILL BELIEVE WE MIGHT HAVE DREAMED OUR ADVENTURE... LOOK AT IT!

IT'S UNBELIEVABLE! THE FURNITURE IS OVERTURNED, JUST AS IT WAS WHEN YOU STRUGGLED WITH RHAN GVA—AS THOUGH YOU ACTUALLY WERE STRUGGLING IN THAT TINY LITTLE ROOM!



THAT IS THE ONLY EXPLANATION BUT WE MUST REMEMBER NEVER TO BREATHE A WORD OF IT TO ANYONE! FOR NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE US!

I... I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT! WE SHOULD MERELY BE THANKFUL IT'S ALL OVER!



THE END

SAPPHIRE OF DESTINY

Roger Bacon returned from the funeral parlor with a great feeling of satisfaction. Martha Rindley lay in her coffin, and the ring was with her. For once he felt free.

It had seemed to him that he would never be rid of Martha, and even now he could hardly believe his luck. Ever since he was a child he had never felt free of the weight of her dominion on him. When she had adopted him, she had extracted that horrible promise he "Promise me you'll never leave me, Roger," she had demanded. "In return I will do everything in the world for you. I am very wealthy, and I'll always give you every luxury you'll ever want."

"I promise," he'd said obediently, and it was then she'd given him the ring that sealed their bargain.

As she'd slipped the ring on his finger she'd commanded, "Keep this ring always, Roger. It is the seal of our agreement and it will always remind you that you are never to leave me."

At the time Roger had been enchanted by the ring. It was a huge silver affair, too large really for his hand. Its circle was composed of two interlocking bands of silver that could never be separated, and where the two circles met there was a star applique.

At times, as he grew older, Roger imagined he could see dim, moving shadows in the depth of the stone, as if some vague, vaporous creatures controlled the destinies of those interlocking bands of silver. And gradually he'd come to hate that ring, feeling as though he were a slave to it and the bargain he'd made.

Now, as Roger Bacon entered the house Martha Rindley had so recently visited, he felt a surge of pride, knowing it was completely his.

But he knew the first thing he'd better do was to check and make sure that no one would ever suspect the death of Martha Rindley had been deliberate. As a doctor, he of course had made out the death certificate. But still, Roger entered his deceased benefactor's room to make sure there was no telltale trace of the arsenic he'd been feeding Martha so craftily during the long weeks of her illness.

Just as he'd thought, once he searched, there was no trace of the poison around. Everything was in order except for the cold, dank odor of death that seemed to cling to the walls.

Roger quickly closed the door behind him and went to his own room. He was tired from the tension of the last few days, and he longed for rest. But then, before he switched on the light, the soft glow of something lying on his dresser made him

stop. He stepped closer to see what it was, and his heart pounded with a frightening force as he saw the ring lying there. It was the ring Martha had given him, the ring that sealed their fates together.

He picked it up with an exclamation. Roger could have sworn that he'd placed it in the coffin earlier that day. But then, he mused, the excitement of carrying out the murder successfully might be causing his mind to play tricks on him. Roger pocketed the ring and then prepared for bed.

The next day Roger attended Martha Rindley's funeral. It was hard to conceal the elation he felt as he approached the coffin. But then he looked down into Martha's grim, dead face, and for a moment it was as though a cold current of air blew over him. From the corpse Martha's hatred of him seemed to emanate. He then Roger shrugged off the feeling as he quickly dropped the ring into the casket. Then he stepped aside and closely watched the lid being lowered and shut.

Shortly afterward, Martha Rindley was buried, and Roger went home. His nerves were on edge, and the thing he needed, he decided, was a trip. He made plans immediately to leave.

He arrived in Paris on a warm summer night at the beginning of the carnival season. He was eager and hungry for the things Martha Rindley's money could buy for him. The streets were packed with costumed fun-seekers, and soon, dressed in the hired outfit of a haïquin, Roger joined the throng.

Roger came to a busy square in the Montmartre section of the city when the girl accosted him. She was young and attractive, and for some puzzling reason she seemed familiar to him. Roger was glad for company, and when she asked, "Would you care to dance with me, Monsieur?" he accepted readily.

They started to dance, and Roger staggered with shock as he put his arm around her. For she seemed cold as though she were not of living flesh.

"He was married to me. Where are you from?"

"I am a traveler like yourself," she said.

Roger Bacon looked down into her face, and fear coursed through him. The upper part of her face was masked, but as he gazed into her eyes he felt as though he were looking into the eyes of someone dead, and yet undead, while the fires of hell pierced his brain. The music seemed to be getting faster and faster, and the girl in his arms danced at a whirligig, dizzying pace.

"We'd better stop," he gasped. But his partner only tugged harder at him, forcing him to dance to her will as she grasped his hand more firmly, whirling him around the square.

"We'll finish this dance together," she informed him softly. And suddenly he became aware that the ring she was wearing was digging into his hand as she held it.

He knew before he slid his glance downward what he would find. And yet a gasp of fright tore from his lips as he saw the two hoops of silver bound with the star sapphire.

Roger tore himself from her grasp and raised his hands to his face, shutting out from his sight the ominous ring. And then, when he dared look again, the girl was gone. Though he searched street after street full of merry-makers, determined to prove to himself that what had happened was no illusion, there was no sign of his former companion.

Roger Bacon returned to his hotel. Hastily, he started to pack his bags. He knew he must get away from this place or lose his reason. As he packed, he thought he felt Martha Rindley's ghostly presence lurking in some shadowy corner of his room, her soft, insistent voice whispering, "Roger, come home. You can't leave me. Come home, ROGER."

He slammed the lid of his bag and checked out of the hotel. Quickly the unhappy man scanned a train schedule and chose the next train out to the Riviera. There would be crowds on the Riviera, he knew. There would be sunshine and light. There, he thought, he would not be afraid.

The first day at the swank Riviera resort, Roger started to regain his calm. As he'd thought, here all was normal, and Martha's accursed presence no longer troubled his conscience. He reveled in the luxurious suite her money made possible, and that night he decided to try his luck in the gambling casino.

As he entered and surveyed the roulette room, he was drawn to the attractive blonde girl who was betting heavily on number four. He watched the roulette wheel whirr several times, and each time the croupier called nasally, "Number five, the winner. Sorry, madame."

In spite of the fact that four kept losing, Roger was impelled to join the girl in her betting. He pulled his wallet from his pocket.

"A thousand francs on number four," he said loudly.

The girl turned then and smiled. "I see you are joining me," she said.

"We'll link our fates together," he gallantly replied.

Steadily they bet on number four while three, five, eight, all the other numbers turned up as winners. Finally Roger discovered that he'd emptied his wallet. At that point his partner, too, made a gesture, indicating she was out of funds. Then suddenly, as he watched, the girl pulled a ring from her finger and smilingly held it out to him in the

palm of her hand.

Roger stared horror-stricken at the twin circles of silver with the star sapphire mounted in the middle. As he looked at the ring in the bright lights of the casino, he could see distinctly the shadowy beings that writhed serpentine within the imprisoning stone.

"I will bet this for the two of us," the creature said, and in her eyes Roger saw the depths of the dead. Her gaze was flat and unseeing, as if, like the girl he'd danced with in Paris, she, too, were some visitor from beyond the grave.

Roger fled from the casino and went back to his room. Once more he packed, and this time he knew that he must return to Martha Rindley's home. In her grave, he knew, was locked the answer to this awful series of happenings. He must make sure that the ring she'd given him was still in her coffin. And then he could be sure that those rings he'd since seen were merely duplicates he'd come across by coincidence.

He returned to the manor toward twilight the following week. He immediately gave his bags to the butler who came to the door.

"Take these upstairs to my room," he commanded. "I shall be back later."

From the caretaker's shack he procured a spade, and then he walked swiftly toward the cemetery where Martha Rindley was buried.

It seemed to his disordered mind that Martha Rindley's delighted laugh accompanied him, that her voice filled the surrounding air, saying, Roger, you have come home, and you will not leave again.

Finally he approached his benefactor's grave. His spade was poised above the mounded earth when he felt a tremendous force pulling at him, so that he had no will, and he was sucked forward, down, down into the ground, and he knew no more.

When Roger Bacon did not return that night, a search was instituted. For days no trace of the missing man was found. Then his papers were gone through, and in a diary he kept the searchers came across Roger's plan for murdering Martha Rindley. The constable immediately ordered the dead woman's grave opened so that an autopsy could be performed and Roger Bacon brought to justice when he was found.

As the diggers approached Martha's grave, it was apparent it had not been disturbed since her death. Grass was growing over the hard-packed earth that resisted the searchers' shovels. But finally the coffin was raised, and the grisly sight inside exposed. There, along with the remains of Martha Rindley, was the body of Roger Bacon, and on his finger was the ring she'd given him that sealed their destinies together.

THE END

THREE WIVES... AND THE WORLD WAS AT LARRY OLIN'S FEET! THREE WIVES WAS WHAT PAPPAN BOON SED HIM... A SMALL TRIPLE FROM THE WEALTH AND FAME THAT THE DEVIL COULD GED AND JOHN HAD SED EAGERLY, FOR HE THOUGHT HE COULD OUTWIT THE UNKNOWN AND THE SUPERNATURAL... BUT HE HAD NOT RECKONED ON...

HAVOC on the Midway



LOOK! THERE HE IS / GET HIM! BASH HIS FACE IN! MURDERER!!

P-PLEASE! ANYTHING! ANYTHING! HELP ME, SATAN! HELP ME!!

TOO LATE, LARRY OLIN! OUR BARGAIN'S SEALED! HA, HA!

IT STARTED OUT LIKE ALL THE OTHER MORNINGS THAT LARRY OLIN HAD WORKED FOR THE OLD MAN--- SOUR, DISMAL, EXASPERATING. PROFESSOR MYSTIK WAS LIKE A MOTHER MEN WITH THOSE STAGE-TRICK DEVICES...

CAREFUL, I SAID! DO YOU HEAR ME? CARRY THAT LIGHT-WHEEL MORE FIRMLY!

YEAH! YEAH! (PUFF) WHY DON'T YA GO INSIDE YOUR TENT?

SILENCE, YOU YOUNG RUP! DO AS I SAY AND NO BACK TALK! NOW GET TO WORK!

OWW!



BEFORE LARRY COULD STRAIGHTEN UP, PROF MYSTIK HAD DISAPPEARED INTO HIS TENT. ANGER COURSED THROUGH LARRY'S VEINS. THIS WAS THE LAST STRAW HE MUST DO SOME-THING ABOUT IT.

YOU OLD RAT/I'LL SMASH YOUR ROTTED HEAD IN FOR THIS!

STILL MUTTERING UNDER YOUR BREATH/ YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A DOG TO HIM!

GLORIA/ SO YOU SAW? WELL, NOW YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN/ A GUY CAN TAKE SO MUCH-- AND TWO YEARS IS MORE THAN ENOUGH!

QUITTING .EHP AND I THOUGHT YOU--LIKED ME, LARRY DEAR!



BABY, YOU KNOW I DO/I'M CRAZY ABOUT YOU/WAIT AND SEE/SOME DAY ALL THIS IS GONNA BE MINE/I'LL GIVE YOU THE WHOLE WORLD!

STILL DREAMING? I'M A CIRCUS ACROBAT--AND YOU'RE JUST A STOOGES TO A MAGIC ACT/ REMEMBER? BUT I DO LIKE YOU--A LITTLE

GLORY/ SO THERE YOU ARE/ AND STILL MAKING EYES AT THAT GOOD-FOR-NOTHING/ I'LL WRING HIS NECK!

H-HUGG/ I-I DIDN'T SEE YOU COME UP, DARLING/ I-I WAS WAITING FOR YOU TO FINISH YOUR ACT

YEAH? I BET/ LISTEN, YOU SKINNY EEL/ THIS IS JUST A WARNING OF WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF YOU MAKE PASSES AT MY GIRL/ SHE'S ENGAGED TO ME!

U-GH .I'M CHOKING!



THAT OVERGROWN JACKASS/ EVERYBODY KNOWS GLORIA GOES FOR ME/ BUT WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT? NOTHING--UNLESS--WAIT--I'VE GOT AN IDEA



THAT NIGHT LARRY DROVE HID IN THE SHADOWS OF PROF MYSTIK'S TENT, WAITING FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT ITSELF.

SO THAT'S THE WAY THE OLD FOOL DOES THOSE TRICKS/ HMM/ IT'S SO EASY NO WONDER HE NEVER LET ME WORK THEM/ HE WAS AFRAID TO LEARN!



WHAT'S THAT? WHO'S IN THOSE SHADOWS? I GOTTA GET AWAY /
COME OUT NOW! HE MUSTN'T SPY ON ME. / SEE ME! HE'LL SHOOT I'LL FIRE ME! I'LL TEACH YOU! / PUT ON THIS MASK AND KNOCK HIM OUT! THEN HE WON'T KNOW WHO IT IS!



FUNNY! I- I GET A STRANGE FEELING WHEN I TOUCH THIS THING! HERE HE COMES! HE'LL NEVER RECOGNIZE ME NOW! HE'LL THINK SOMEONE'S PLAYING A JOKE!



THOUGHT YOU COULD SWINDLE ME OF A LIFETIME OF KNOWLEDGE, EH? YOU'RE THROUGH, OL' N! YOU'LL NEVER WORK ON THIS MIDWAY AGAIN!



OH, NO? NOBODY WILL MAKE ME LEAVE HERE!

I'LL HAVE TO KILL YOU, PROFESSOR! YOU WON'T BLACKBALL ME! I'M GONNA TAKE OVER YOUR JOB! I WORKED HARD ENOUGH AT IT!

AGHHH! STOP!! NO AAAAGHH!



AND WHEN NO MORE WHEEZES WHISTLED OUT FROM THAT LIFELESS HULK.

HEAR THAT? THAT CAME FROM PROFESSOR MYSTIC'S TENT!

HE SCREAMED! THEY HEARD-- AND I'M COOKED UNLESS I CAN CLEAR OUT FAST!

SOMEONE'S IN THERE WITH HIM! LOOK! HIS SHADOW! GET HIM!



I CAN'T RUN ANY FASTER! THEY'RE CATCHING UP!

THERE HE GOES! STOP HIM! HE MURDERED THE PROFESSOR!



AND LARRY OLIN RAN FOR HIS LIFE, BAZED, TERRIFIED-- WITH ONLY ONE THOUGHT IN HIS FRANTIC MIND-- ESCAPE-- ESCAPE-- ESCAPE!!

TH--THEY DON'T SEE ME GO IN HERE! I--I THINK I'VE LOST THEM! (GASP, GASP)

HA! HA!



W-WHO ARE YOU? W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THOSE SHADOWS?

MY BUSINESS IS MOSTLY TRANSACTED IN SHADOWS, MY FRIEND! AS TO WHO I AM--- PERHAPS YOU RECOGNIZE ME?



SATAN! NO--- I'M GOING NUTS! YOU'RE MASQUERADING TO SCARE ME! YOU CAN'T BE REAL!

OH, BUT I AM! AND I SEE YOUR SITUATION IS MOST PRESSING! I'M AFRAID YOU BUNGLED YOUR JOB, MY OVERAMBITIOUS YOUNG FRIEND!



IT HADDA BE LARRY OLIN--- NO ONE ELSE! HE HATED THE OLD MAN! I THINK I SAW HIM RUN INSIDE THERE!

WELL--DO I COAX YOU INTO THE OBVIOUS BARGAIN FOR YOUR SOUL--OR DO YOU AGREE TO MY TERMS AND GAIN WHAT YOU DESIRE MOST?

ANYTHING-- ANYTHING-- ONLY DON'T LET THEM TOUCH ME!



THEN LISTEN CLOSELY. THE MASK YOU WEAR SHALL BE MY POWER! WITH IT ON, NO ONE CAN HARM YOU--- NOT EVEN I! YOU HAVE THREE WISHES! AFTER THAT--- YOUR SOUL IS MINE! AND NOW.



THE DARKNESS ENCLOSED LARRY OLIN LIKE A SHROUD--AND WHEN NEXT IT OPENED, HE WAS FLUNG INTO AN ABYSS OF UTTER HORROR! THE VEIL OF SPACE WAS TORN ASUNDER--AND TIME SLID BACK INTO THE PAST!



HELP! HELP!

HE WAS BACK ONCE AGAIN AT A FAMILIAR TENT--BACK AGAIN WATCHING AN OLD MAN PERFORM JEALOUSLY GUARDED TRICKS--AN OLD MAN WHO SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ALIVE.

IT--IT HAD TO BE A DREAM! THAT--THAT JOURNEY COULDN'T HAVE BEEN REAL!



NO ONE'S AFTER ME THOUGH--AND THE PROFESSOR IS STILL ALIVE! BUT I KNOW I KILLED HIM! THAT CREATURE---WHAT-EVER IT WAS---SAID I HAD THREE WISHES! ALL RIGHT--I WISH THE OLD JERK KICKS THE BUCKET--RIGHT NOW!!





AGGHHH

INSTANTLY THE OLD MAN WAS CRUSHED UNDER THE HEAVY WOODEN TENT-SUPPORT. MEN CAME RUNNING FROM ALL PARTS OF THE BIG-TOP-- AND LARRY OLIN PUT ON HIS GREATEST ACT..



I--I SHOUTED FOR HIM TO RUN! I WAS PRACTICING A ROUTINE OUTSIDE WHEN I SAW IT HAPPEN! HE DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE!

MUST HAVE BEEN A FREAK WIND! I NEVER SEEN NUTHIN' LIKE IT IN MY LIFE!



THE OLD GUY NEVER EVEN KNEW WHAT PUT HIM!

THAT'S THE END OF ME TOO, I GUESS! WITH HIM DEAD, I GOT NO JOB HERE! I LEARNED ALL HIS ACTS-- BUT WITH-OUT HIM-- IT AIN'T RIGHT!



NONSENSE, MY BOY! AS OWNER OF THIS CIRCUS, I HAVE THE LAST SAY-- AND I THINK YOU CAN CON-TINUE WITH MYSTIK'S STUFF! GIVE IT A TRY!

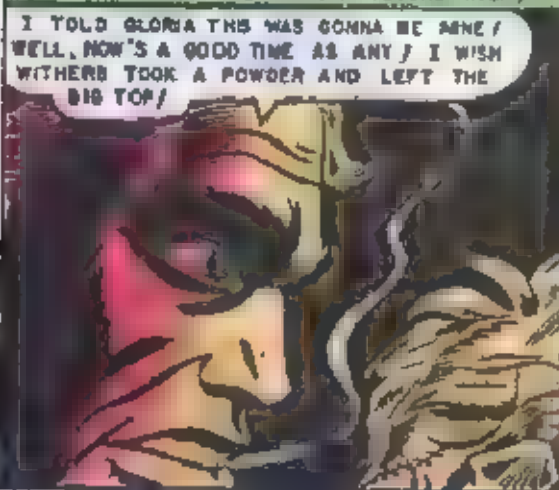
THANKS, MR. WITHERS. I'LL DO MY BEST!



THIS, LARRY OLIN BECAME ONE OF THE TOP DRAWER ACTS ON THE MIDWAY HIS NAME GREW AS HIS FAME FOR CUNNING TRICKS PULLED IN AN ADMIRING CROWD

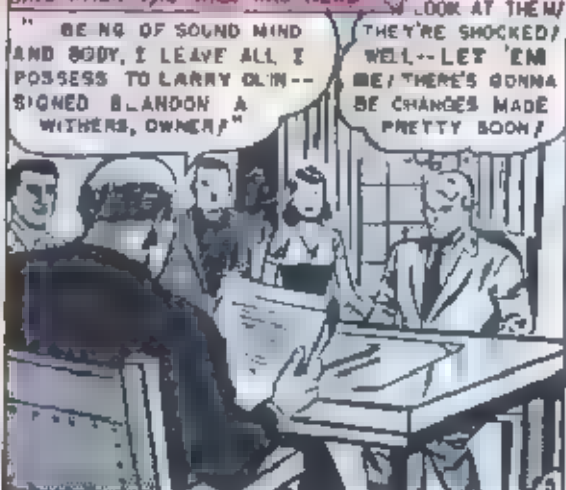
HEAR YE--HEAR ALL! WATCH HOW I DO IT! THE HAND IS FASTER THAN THE EYE! NOW YOU SEE IT--NOW YOU DON'T!

WITH FAME CAME MONEY, OF COURSE--BUT FOR LARRY OLIN, FAME AND MONEY WEREN'T ENOUGH! IT WAS TIME FOR THE MASK & SECOND WISH!



I TOLD GLORIA THIS WAS GONNA BE ME! WELL, NOW'S A GOOD TIME AS ANY! I WISH WITHERS TOOK A POWDER AND LEFT THE BIG TOP!

THE NEXT DAY, BLANDON WITHERS WAS FOUND IN HIS BED HAVING DIED PEACEFULLY, EVIDENTLY, AND WHEN THE WILL WAS READ--



"BEING OF SOUND MIND AND BODY, I LEAVE ALL I POSSESS TO LARRY OLIN-- SIGNED BLANDON A WITHERS, OWNER!"

LOOK AT THEM! THEY'RE SHOCKED! WELL--LET 'EM BE! THERE'S GONNA BE CHANGES MADE PRETTY SOON!

FOR INSTANCE--GLORIA IS GONNA BE MY GIRL NOW / THAT ELEPHANT OF A STRONG-MAN BETTER STAY OUTTA MY WAY--OR ELSE /

LARRY OLIN WAS RICH, POWERFUL. THE WORLD WAS AT HIS FEET. NOW... GLORIA

DARLING... I-- I WANT TO BELIEVE YOU-- BUT I'M AFRAID HUGO WILL--

THAT OX WON'T DO ANYTHIN' MONEY / I'M BOSS-MAN HERE NOW-- AND IF I SAY YOU'RE GONNA BE MY WIFE--THAT'S THE WAY IT'S GONNA BE /

YAP? WELL--WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT / YOU CAN FIRE ME NOW, MR. OLIN--BUT YOU AIN'T STOPPING ME FROM FIXING YOUR WAGON /

AARRRHH...

HUGO! STOP IT / YOU'RE KILLING HIM /

FROM THAT DAY ON, LARRY OLIN WAS NEVER THE SAME. NOR WAS HUGO FIRED. LARRY WAS SAYING HIM FOR SOMETHING TOO HORRIBLE TO PUT TO COMPLETION IMMEDIATELY. THEN A SCANT TWO WEEKS AFTERWARDS, IN HUGO'S TENT...

LADIES AN' GENTLEMEN... HUGO WILL NOW LIFT 500 POUNDS, AND--- HUGO--WHAT'S WRONG?

M-MY HEART... IT'S--- ARGHHH...

EEEEEE / HE'S DEAD / HE JUST TOPPLED OVER LIKE A DOLL /

ONE SIDE, FOLKS / IT'S JUST AN ACT / NOTHING TO GET EXCITED ABOUT /

THAT WAS MY THIRD WISH / NOW GLORIA WILL BE MINE /

AND SOON AFTERWARDS...

I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU MAN AND WIFE /

BUT LARRY OLIN'S HAPPINESS WAS SHORT-LIVED. HIS WONDERFUL, ROMANTIC GLORIA TURNED OUT TO BE A SHREW OF THE WORST SORT. THEIR ARGUMENTS WERE FAMOUS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY...

AWW! SHUT UP /

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU TO ALWAYS BRING IN THE CIRCUS RECEIPTS AFTER WE CLOSE THE GATES?

THANK GOD I'VE GOT BUSINESS TRIPS TO MAKE / ANYTHING IS BETTER THAN THIS /

INTO THIS STATE OF Huddled Affairs, came a visitor one night. Satan wanted his due... Well, my friend! I see that the mask has kept my part of the bargain! Now it is time to keep yours!



WHAT THE-- YOU?

OH NO YOU DON'T! MY SOUL STAYS WITH ME! AS LONG AS I WEAR THIS MASK WHILE YOU'RE HERE, YOU'RE HARMLESS!



AH, CLEVER! SO YOU HAVE WON FOR NOW-- BUT I WON'T NEED TO USE FORCE! YOU SHALL JOIN ME PRESENTLY!

AND SATAN DISAPPEARED AS QUETLY AS HE HAD COME. MINUTES LATER, LARRY OLIN WAS CHUCKLING TO HIMSELF OVER THE WAY HE HAD TRICKED THE DEVIL, WHEN...

I SURE PUT IT OVER ON HIM! THE ONLY WAY I'LL GIVE UP MY SOUL IS WHEN I DIE A NATURAL DEATH!

SO THAT'S WHAT YOU DO THE MINUTE YOU COME BACK FROM YOUR BUSINESS TRIP-- PLAY GAMES! AND THE RECEIPTS?



THEY RAVED AND RANTED UP AND DOWN THE TENT-- THEY ARGUED TERRIBLY... AND FINALLY, LARRY COULD STAND IT NO LONGER.



YOU'RE TOO NASTY, MY DEAR! I'M TIRED OF YOU! GOOD-BYE-- AND GOOD RIDDANCE!

LARRY! D-DON'T! GASP... SLUR... OHMM...

BUT FATE PLAYS STRANGE TRICKS-- AND ONCE MORE LARRY OLIN HAD BEEN HEARD MEN RAN TOWARDS THE TENT-- POINTING... SHOUTING...

I SAW THE GUY'S FACE WHEN HE LOOKED OUT OF THE TENT! IT'S TOO HORRIBLE TO MISS! COME ON! MRS. OLIN IS IN THERE!

THEY STILL THINK I'M AWAY ON MY TRIP! GOOD! I'LL BURN THE MASK AND SAY THE "ROBBER" TRIED TO KILL ME TOO! WITHOUT THE MASK THEY CAN'T PROVE ANYTHING!



HE RAN TO MEET THEM, SHOUTING THAT THE "ROBBER" HAD FLED, BUT THEY SEIZED HIM AND ALMOST KILLED HIM!



I'M LARRY OLIN! LET ME GO! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU MEN?

SHUT YER TRAP, MAC! WITH THAT FACE, YOU'D HAVE TO BE A MIGHTY GOOD LIAR! SEND FER THE LAW, BOYS! WE CAUGHT OURSELVES A MURDERIN' RAT!

I-- I DON'T UNDERSTAND! M-MY FACE? THERE'S A MIRROR HERE! I'LL-- Y-A-A-A-A-H!

COME ALONG, LARRY! MUSTN'T KEEP THE ELECTRIC CHAIR WAITING! YOU'LL JOIN ME VERY SOON! HA, HA! OUR BARGAIN HAS BEEN SEALED!



THE END

First Lieutenant
Henry A. Commiskey, USMC
Medal of Honor



ONE SEPTEMBER DAY, NEAR Yongdongsan, Korea, Lieutenant Commiskey's platoon was assaulting a vital position called Hill 85. Suddenly it hit a field of fire from a Red machine gun. The important attack stopped cold. Alone, and armed with only a .45 calibre pistol, Lieutenant Commiskey jumped to his feet, rushed the gun. He dispatched its five-man crew, then reloaded, and cleaned out another foxhole. Inspired by his daring, his platoon cleared and captured the hill. Lieutenant Commiskey says:

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